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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 684th MEETING

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva,
on Wednesday, 17 January 2001, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. OUEDRAOGO

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The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS OF STATES PARTIES (agenda item 4) (continued)

Initial report of Lithuania (continued) (CRC/C/11/Add.21; HRI/CORE/1/Add.97; written replies of the Government of Lithuania to the questions in the list of issues (document without a symbol distributed in the meeting room in English only))

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, the members of the delegation of Lithuania resumed places at the Committee table.

2. Ms. MIKALAUSKAITĖ (Lithuania) said that in 1998 a working group on sexual abuse and violence against children had been established to draw up a State policy and programme, taking into consideration the outcome of the 1996 World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children. The programme, which had begun in 2000, was funded from the State budget, with the participation of the Ministries of Social Security and Labour, Education and Science, Justice and the Interior, and was managed by a group of experts. The group had conducted a survey on sexual abuse and exploitation in Lithuania and was preparing to publish a book and other documentation on the subject. In 2001 the programme would set up a database for the use of specialists and practitioners as part of a cooperation plan with the Nordic Council, under an initiative taken by the Governments of Sweden and Norway.

3. According to statistics, Lithuania's suicide rate had become one of the worst in the region. Both the President and the Parliament had taken many initiatives to try to formulate a policy to prevent suicide and to obtain a better understanding of the phenomenon. For the time being, services were provided mainly at the municipal level by mental health centres, which received funding from the Ministry of Health Care. Social workers and psychologists also worked on a regular basis in schools, and a free hotline had been set up.

4. The Children's Parliament included the participation of 12 to 18-year-olds, and provided them with the opportunity to express their views to the Seimas and to the Government. It was also an important factor in teaching children about governance and decision-making.

5. Mr. JATKEVIČIUS (Lithuania) said that 50 per cent of the members of the Council for Children's Affairs which reported to the President were members of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as was the chairman of the Council. One of the non-governmental members was the representative of the Children's Parliament. Lithuanian Government funding for NGOs was given only if the organization in question had won a competition. The principal aim of such competitions was to find professional staff to fill voids in State institutions. Some NGOs also received funding from foreign sources.

6. NGOs had taken part in the drafting of the initial report, and would do so for periodic reports as well. They would also follow and express their opinions on the current deliberations of the Committee. In June 2000 a national conference on the Government's report on the implementation of the Convention in Lithuania had been organized by NGOs, with the participation of Government ministries, politicians and persons working with children.

7. Mr. KAIRELIS (Lithuania) said that two thirds of the proceeds from the privatization fund were earmarked to restore the population's savings and to support small and medium-sized enterprises, and that one third was used for Government programmes, including social programmes which benefited children.

8. Ms. MOKHUANE asked at what age a child was entitled to seek medical advice without parental consent. How did the State party ensure that there was no discrimination against children from dysfunctional families? While she understood that corporal punishment was prohibited by law, she would like to find out more about concrete steps taken to ensure that the practice was effectively not tolerated in schools, institutions and homes. There had been an increasing amount of pornography and violence on television, and the media had reportedly been projecting a positive image of prostitution. Had the Government drawn up any guidelines to protect children from the harmful effects of such programmes? According to some reports, Lithuanian children spent about four hours a day watching television. What measures had the Government taken to encourage them to read books or engage in other activities?

9. The Law on Privatization of Flats had apparently failed to protect children's property rights. Could the Government provide further details on the new law it intended to adopt, and explain how it would take the best interests of the child into account? What were the Government's priorities in caring for disadvantaged and disabled children, and how much of the State budget was devoted to such care? She had learned of programmes to encourage road safety at an early age. It would be useful to know whether they had been successful, and if so, to receive further details about them. How did the State intend to address the problem of child abuse, and how did it ensure that the children of foreign nationals and stateless persons would not be subjected to discrimination?

10. She had received disturbing reports concerning the activities of a religious sect called Invitation à la vie intense, which had targeted children. She asked whether the Government was aware of that phenomenon, and how would it address it. Were children's associations free to operate independently? Were there any requirements for registration or legal constraints on their activities?

11. Ms. KARP, noting that four years had passed since the adoption of new legislation in the field of children's rights and that some gaps persisted between law and practice, asked whether the Government had set any targets for the effective implementation of the new law. Education was a major responsibility of the Government, yet the State reportedly did not participate in the production of children's literature. Was that the case, and if so, what was the Government's policy concerning support for that sector? There were many statistics regarding corporal punishment, which, although banned, continued to be quite prevalent. There had been reports of violence and even sexual abuse in children's care institutions. Were any measures being taken to check that phenomenon through disciplinary or criminal sanctions for the perpetrators? Did the prohibition apply to both schools and institutions? She would be interested to know whether parents were provided with counselling to advise them on alternative ways of disciplining their children.

12. While no one could be sure of the extent of prostitution and human trafficking in Lithuania, it was clearly a serious problem. Both Lithuanian and foreign women and children

had been sent from Lithuania to work as prostitutes in many countries, including her own. In addition, there were reportedly a large number of disappearances among such persons, in part because of a lack of modern services to help track them. Could the Government estimate how many children were involved? Was it cooperating with any other countries to ensure that Lithuanians who were deported home were given the treatment and rehabilitation services they needed during and after deportation? Were any measures being taken in schools to inform children about the risks associated with prostitution and the involvement in such activities of organized crime? Perhaps the delegation could inform the Committee how the new Criminal Code dealt with organized crime, and what effective sanctions were applied to traffickers. Did the law protect boys as well as girls from such trafficking?

13. From the information at her disposal, she understood that prostitution was an administrative offence. Child prostitutes were thus brought to administrative courts, where they were treated as offenders. Would it not be preferable to deal with them as children requiring treatment? The administrative courts apparently did not even have the authority to send children to educational institutions.

14. Additional information would be welcome concerning the infrastructure for abused children who had to testify in court. Did the procedure allow testimony given out of court to be admissible, thus avoiding the need for the child to testify twice? The Government had made a real effort to make up for the shortfall of psychiatrists and social workers in the juvenile justice system. Had similar efforts been made for childcare institutions and governmental institutions dealing with children? The Government could also inform the Committee in more detail about efforts to establish special family courts.

15. Mr. DOEK asked to what extent municipalities had the power to make decisions on social policy, and whether they had the right to levy taxes or to raise funds in any other ways. He expressed concern about the alleged infiltration in a Lithuanian organization called SOS Vaikai by the French sect mentioned by Ms. Mokhuane, Invitation à la vie intense, which had previously been identified by the French parliament as a dangerous group and which reportedly brainwashed its followers.

16. According to the initial report, some 130,000 single mothers and 15,000 single fathers lived in the country. Yet the long list of social insurance benefits in the written replies included no benefits for single parent families. The report stated that children living without either parent were placed in families, family-type foster homes (extended families) or childcare institutions. What was the difference between accommodation in families and in family-type foster homes? Did the State party have any policy to support reunification of abandoned children with their parents? The number of children lacking a guardian had increased by about 80 per cent between 1992 and 1997, and on average about 300 to 350 children had been adopted per year. Yet the report stated that some 6,000 had been adopted in recent years. What accounted for that discrepancy?

17. While Lithuania was a party to the 1993 Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption, there had recently been reports of a

German couple giving gifts to a pregnant woman in exchange for an arranged adoption, with the connivance of a member of the Seimas. Such behaviour was clearly against the Hague Convention.

18. The new Family Code abolished deprivation of parental rights, which had previously been considered the only way to protect children who were at risk of sexual abuse and violence within the family. What measures would henceforth be used in such cases to provide an effective remedy for child abuse and neglect?

19. While he welcomed the encouraging statistics with regard to school enrolment, the number of children dropping out of school was a serious concern. Some reports estimated that 20,000 children had either dropped out or failed to enrol. What was the Government doing to address that problem?

20. He asked whether the Government was doing enough to curb alcohol abuse among parents, which was a major cause of dysfunctional families.

21. He understood that the new Juvenile Justice Programme had been designed to foster alternatives to imprisonment, but to what extent were such alternatives currently used? Did children, in practice, enjoy the right to legal counsel and was there sufficient contact between parents and detained children? Lastly, he would be interested to learn what was being done to reduce the length of pre-trial detention for minors.

22. Ms. SARDENBERG said that the Committee would be grateful if it could be kept informed of the activities of the Youth Parliament, which she considered to be a very important initiative. She asked whether Roma children in particular were victims of discrimination.

23. It was evident from the report that there had been a tendency in the past to institutionalize children for a whole range of reasons. What progress had been made to date to reverse that trend and had research been done to find out the most effective means of doing so? She would appreciate more details of supervisory and inspection mechanisms, as well as training schemes for the staff of institutions.

24. Did the Government plan to introduce any changes to lighten the overloaded school curricula? In view of the disparity that already existed between rural and urban areas in terms of educational provision, she failed to understand why rural schools were still being closed down.

25. She shared Mr. Doek's concern at the lack of transparency of adoption procedures. Despite the fact that Lithuania was a party to the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption, it appeared that little had been done either to reduce the number of intercountry adoptions or to monitor the development of children placed in families abroad. Violations of adoption rules were too frequent in both domestic and international cases.

26. There was an unusually high number of missing persons, which included both young women and men. Did the Government intend to seek ways of arresting that trend? What plans were there to curb drug abuse, particularly among adolescents?

27. Ms. EL GUINDI said that in cases of intercountry adoption, States should ensure that mechanisms were in place to ensure that the best interests of the child were being given priority.

28. Mr. FULCI said that children acquired citizenship if their parents were not Lithuanian citizens but permanent residents in the country, but was that still the case if a family had no permanent place of residence?

29. Referring to the United States Department of State Human Rights Report on Lithuania, he expressed concern at the number of child abuse cases, frequently caused by alcohol abuse, which ranged from deliberate starvation to beatings and even murder. There appeared to be no government department responsible for collecting information about child abuse, no criminal laws against sex tourism and child pornography and only one rehabilitation centre for the victims of abuse. He would be grateful if the Child Ombudsman could elaborate on the Government's plans to address that situation.

30. Non-governmental organizations reported that the number of street children had remained constant at about 300 for the previous three years. He failed to understand why it had not been possible to find accommodation for even some of those children.

31. There was a constant need for Governments to raise awareness of the importance of beastfeeding in order to counter the propaganda of companies marketing substitutes. Did Lithuania have any plans to address the problem of widespread ignorance of the advantages of breastfeeding? Despite the adoption of a government programme in 1997 to curb alcohol and drug abuse, there had been an increase in the number of addicts in recent years. He asked why the programme had been so ineffective, and what new steps the Government intended to take.

32. Ms. TIGERSTEDT-TÄHTELÄ said she was concerned about the existence of discrimination against single mothers. In its concluding observations on the consideration of a report of Lithuania in June 2000, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women had found that the persistence of stereotypes concerning the role of women in Lithuanian society perpetuated sexual discrimination. In particular, there were very few women occupying important posts in business or the judiciary. Could the delegation elaborate on whether action had been taken since then to bring about a change of attitudes? She asked whether the Government had considered steps to attract more girls to study mathematics and sciences at school.

33. Ms. RILANTONO said that one in every ten children was reported to suffer from neglect, forcing many young people into begging. Did specific programmes exist to help strengthen families, particularly in view of their often difficult economic circumstances?

34. Referring to a report by the World Health Organization, she said that over half of disabled children appeared to be suffering from mental health problems. Had any research been carried out into the possible causes of such a high rate of mental illness? Could the delegation provide information about efforts to remove children with special needs from institutions and help them to integrate more successfully into mainstream education?

35. She welcomed the fact that education was compulsory until the age of 15, but pre-school education, on the other hand, was limited to just one year. The Committee would appreciate more information on the arrangements for pre-school education, including the extent to which it was provided for in the State sector.

36. Mr. RABAH, referring to the high juvenile crime statistics, said the new Juvenile Justice Programme was a welcome initiative, but it was essential to concentrate more efforts on addressing the problems that led to crime in the first place. Furthermore, the approach to justice should focus on rehabilitation rather than detention. Was it true that there was only one rehabilitation centre currently in operation? He would be interested to learn whether there were sufficient numbers of trained social workers to assist the victims of police brutality, particularly in the course of legal proceedings, and whether any research had been done into means of curbing such abuses.

The meeting was suspended at 4.15 p.m. and resumed at 4.30 p.m.

37. Ms. ARMONAVIČIENĖ (Lithuania) said that every child was entitled to free health care pursuant to the Law on Health Insurance and that minors had the right to decide on their own treatment if they were adjudged capable of doing so. Parents were required to be kept informed if a child was admitted to hospital.

38. Ms. MIKALAUSKAITĖ (Lithuania) said that her Government attempted to help dysfunctional families as much as possible in order to avoid removing children from their natural parents. However, a child could be placed in a foster family or institution if, as a result of an investigation, placement was considered to be in his or her best interests. If such a step were taken, social workers were employed to assist in the rehabilitation of families with a view to the child's eventual return.

39. Mr. JATKEVIČIUS (Lithuania) said that excessive corporal punishment as well as sexual harassment were forbidden under the Criminal Code. There were courses, run by psychologists, designed to instruct parents in alternative means of correction, and 130 social workers and psychologists were currently trained specifically to help the victims of ill-treatment.

40. Ms. IMBRASIENĖ (Lithuania) said that new legislation forbidding the publication of child pornography had been adopted in 1999, and a working party to draft a new law on children's rights in that regard had been established only the previous week. The law would be designed to address the issue of the dissemination of pornography over the Internet.

41. Ms. MIKALAUSKAITĖ (Lithuania) said that the predominance of television in family life was not confined to Lithuanian society. However, while it was true that children spent less time reading books than in the past, they were turning to new sources, such as the Internet, for information. The challenge of the technology age was to ensure that children were not isolated and that they discovered possibilities of developing their creative faculties. To that end, courses in Web site creation were being offered to Lithuanian children.

42. Mr. JATKEVIČIUS (Lithuania), replying to a question about children's property rights, said that, in every civil case involving a child over the age of 10, that child's opinion was required to be taken into consideration. Children also had the right to be heard when a decision by their parents implied a change in place of residence.

43. Ms. MIKALAUSKAITĖ (Lithuania) said that new policies on the welfare of children with disabilities had been developed. The entire system was to be reformed over the next 10 years and new legal provisions concerning the reintegration of disabled persons into normal social life would be enacted. Capacity-related opportunities would be created in the labour market. Families with disabled children would receive financial assistance so that proper care could be provided within the home. In general, the State's policy was to scale down the role of institutions for handicapped children. Many services were currently provided at the municipal level, with NGO assistance. She could not provide precise figures for the current budget allocation but would forward the information to the Committee in due course.

44. Mr. KAIRELIS (Lithuania) said that road accidents were a major problem in Lithuania, partly because of the sudden sharp increase in car purchases. Two years previously, the penalties for driving under the influence of alcohol had been greatly increased in a bid to bring down the accident rate. A standing commission of deputy ministers met regularly at the Ministry of Transport to discuss ways of improving safety on the roads, especially for children.

45. Ms. MIKALAUSKAITĖ (Lithuania) said that child abuse was a key issue on the Government's policy agenda. More and more facts concerning abuse, especially within the home, had come to light. During the post-independence period, the privacy of the home had been fiercely defended against any attempt by the authorities to intervene. However, some attempts were now being made to address the issue. Awareness-building programmes for families and society in general were being considered as well as ways of encouraging children to stand up for their rights and resist parental abuse.

46. Ms. BARAKAUSKIENĖ (Lithuania) said that children born in Lithuania of stateless parents without permanent residence status did not acquire Lithuanian citizenship. A commission had been established by presidential decree to evaluate the existing legislation. It would consider the issue of citizenship for children in the light of the provisions of the Convention.

47. Ms. MIKALAUSKAITĖ (Lithuania) said that the religious sect Invitation à la Vie Intense (IVI), an organization based in France, had tried to infiltrate the Lithuanian NGO SOS Vaikai which looked after abandoned children. In 1995, SOS Vaikai had launched a fostering programme with families in France through "FAMILIS", the World Organization for Families. French families had visited Lithuania and Lithuanian children had spent their holidays in France. However, a member of FAMILIS with IVI contacts had created difficulties within the Lithuanian NGO, prompting the Government to file an official complaint with the French authorities. According to an informal response from the French Embassy, the sect was suspected of criminal activities in France but it had been very difficult to produce the evidence needed for a conviction. The Office of the President of Lithuania had established a commission to investigate the activities of SOS Vaikai and had taken steps to ensure the safety of the children concerned.

48. Mr. JATKEVIČIUS (Lithuania) said that children had an unrestricted right to establish and run associations provided that they were registered with the Ministry of Justice.

49. With regard to the lead time for implementation of new legislation, the normal period was between 6 and 12 months to allow specialists and society as a whole to familiarize themselves with the provisions. The period had been longer - over two years - in the case of the Criminal Code because of the need to harmonize its provisions with those of other codes. The corresponding period for the Civil Code had been one year.

50. Mr. PLIKŠNYS (Lithuania) said that the Government supported publishers of children's literature. For example, children's books were exempt from value added tax, which made them 18 per cent cheaper than other books. All school textbooks were issued to students free of charge.

51. Every school had a 15-member school council, comprising five student representatives and five representatives each of parents and teachers. A system of internal and external evaluation of schools had recently been introduced. The internal evaluation covered, inter alia, methods of punishment. If teachers were found to have breached the rules, they were liable to various forms of disciplinary action, including suspension.

52. Mr. JATKEVIČIUS (Lithuania) said that the existing Penal Code and the Children's Code prohibited trafficking in people and, specifically, trafficking in juveniles. The new Penal Code also contained separate articles on trafficking.

53. Ms. MIKALAUSKAITĖ (Lithuania) said that missing persons fell into two categories, those who went into hiding because of criminal acts or inability to pay their debts and those whose disappearance was involuntary. Four or five years previously, there had been no special regulations governing children who went abroad to study. In some cases, they had disappeared without trace. In one case currently being investigated, children had been taken from boarding schools and placed in foster families outside the country for educational purposes. The families had then changed their place of residence and left no forwarding address. Interpol had been involved in the effort to trace them.

54. Mr. JATKEVIČIUS (Lithuania) said that the existing criminal legislation concerning sexual exploitation was sometimes more difficult to apply to boys than to girls. However, the new Penal Code was gender-neutral. Under the existing Code of Criminal Procedure, child victims of violent or sexual crime could be required to give testimony on three occasions: before the investigator, the prosecutor and the court. According to specialists, the process of interrogation could be intimidating for a child. Hence, under the draft Code of Criminal Procedure, child victims were required to appear before officials only once or, if absolutely necessary, twice. Provision was also made for audio and video recording of testimony, and the participation of parents, a legal representative and specialists such as psychologists, teachers or social workers was required at all stages of the proceedings. Under the existing legislation, such participation was strongly recommended but not compulsory.

55. Ms. MIKALAUSKAITĖ (Lithuania) said that social workers had been unknown in Lithuania until five or six years previously. An Educational Centre for Social Workers had been established as well as 10 training centres for rural areas. An annual budget allocation was made to the social sector and licenses were issued to professionally-qualified social workers.

56. Mr. JATKEVIČIUS (Lithuania) said there was no separate family code, but specialized family judges dealt with both civil and criminal cases involving juveniles. A survey was being conducted to determine whether juvenile and family courts were necessary or whether special branches of higher courts and special judges in lower courts were sufficient. It was also a matter of funding. In some parts of the country, only two or three cases were dealt with each year.

57. The participation of the Children's Rights Agency in juvenile court proceedings was already guaranteed. But under the draft legislation, a team of psychologists, teachers, social workers and paediatricians under the chairmanship of the Agency had to sign a written recommendation for the judge or the court on alternative measures in criminal cases and on various possible decisions in civil cases. A court that failed to act on the recommendation was required to give reasons in writing for its decision.

58. Prostitution was not a crime but an administrative offence. The penalties for prostitution under the existing Administrative Code ranged from a warning or payment of a fine to arrest. There was no provision for placement in special care or in an educational institution, but it was a good idea and he would personally see to it that a corresponding draft amendment to the Code was tabled.

59. Mr. KAIRELIS (Lithuania) said that municipalities were, of course, required to comply with the legislation regarding social protection but they were also free to take other initiatives, especially in the area of social assistance. They could seek additional funding for such projects from private individuals and other sources. When the Government or Parliament took a decision that called for extra spending in the middle of the financial year, tough discussions with the municipalities often occurred and the central authorities were sometimes required to provide subsidies.

60. Ms. MIKALAUSKAITĖ (Lithuania) said that there had been a marked increase in single-parent families. A single parent with one or two children was viewed as a family and received the usual benefits. Many such families resulted from divorce. The special allowance for single mothers introduced in the early 1990s had been converted into a family allowance. Single parents also enjoyed tax relief. The Ministry of Social Security and Labour was about to conduct a survey of family assistance in order to make recommendations to the Government on the restructuring of assistance to all families with children. It would also look into the question of support services, especially in cases of family violence. Parents would be encouraged, for example, to seek psychological support.

61. A new approach had been adopted since independence to the welfare of children deprived of parental care. In particular, the foster family system was being promoted as an alternative to institutional care. Some foster families took in more than one child. Foster homes for six or seven children, modelled on the extended family, had been established in the early 1990s as an alternative to the institutions inherited from the Soviet era. It had been somewhat difficult to

define such structures in the legislation enacted in 1998 since they did not correspond either to a normal family or to a regular institution. Three separate ministries catered for children deprived of parental care. Infants under the age of three were assigned to nurseries run by the Ministry of Health; residential institutions for older children were run by the Ministry of Social Security and Labour and boarding schools were run by the Ministry of Education. The system was thus both costly and unwieldy and a survey was being conducted with a view to introducing reforms. The findings would be available in May 2001.

62. The first intercountry adoptions had taken place in 1992 and 1993 at a time when both national and international legislation on such arrangements had been lacking. When the media had drawn attention to abuses of the system in the mid-1990s, Lithuanian legislation had been amended to cover such cases and Lithuania had ratified the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption in 1997. However, implementation of the Convention had been delayed pending the establishment of a specialized supervisory institution, which had begun to operate on 1 August 2000.

63. Mr. JATKEVIČIUS (Lithuania) said that current civil legislation still provided for a restriction of parental rights; however, that would be changed as of July 2001. Thereafter, the separation of children and parents or the restriction of parental rights would have a limited duration and would be terminated when the negative circumstances ceased. Restriction of the rights of the parents might involve limitations on seeing their children, acting on their behalf or spending their assets.

64. Mr. PLIKŠNYS (Lithuania) said that statistics showed that there might be as many as 20,000 school drop-outs; however, Ministry of Education statistics were not reliable and the number could be 10,000 or 15,000. The problem was that some children between 7 and 16 years of age did not have a personal code. Now every child received a code at the age of seven. Therefore, it was known how many children attended school, but the exact number of drop-outs would not be known for at least another year.

65. The Ministry of Education had initiated some profiling measures to motivate children to continue on to secondary school. The structure of compulsory education had been changed one year before, extending schooling to 10 grades and up to 16 years of age; as a result about 10,000 more children were attending school. Another measure planned for 2002 involved providing financial incentives to schools to attract more students.

66. Mr. DOEK asked what were the activities of the 10,000 to 20,000 children who did not attend school. Were there school inspectors and, if so, did they report on the number of children who were not attending school?

67. Mr. PLIKŠNYS (Lithuania) said that children who did not attend school probably worked on family farms or in family businesses, were on the street or simply did nothing.

68. Lithuania did have school inspectors; however, under municipal law, it was the municipalities that had to report every year on how many children were in school and how many

had dropped out. When a child of less than 16 years of age failed to pass his courses, the schoo had the obligation to try and place him in another programme. The inspectors reviewed the action taken by the municipalities.

69. Ms. KARP said that every system differentiated between drop-outs and children who occasionally missed school and asked whether the statistical data reflected both categories.

70. Mr. PLIKŠNYS (Lithuania) said that the Ministry of Education and Science had data only on children who dropped out of school. Although information was available on children living in villages who had never been enrolled in school, there was no similar information on children living in large cities.

71. Mr. JATKEVIČIUS (Lithuania) said that a number of alternatives to criminal punishme of children were available. They included apology to the victim, compensation of damage caused to the victim, custody by parents or other legal representative, community service, supervision by the family and placement in a special home. Unfortunately, the measures had n been very effective, because there were no specific guidelines on when each alternative should be applied. Efforts were being made to improve the system in the new Penal Code.

72. The child's right to legal counselling was provided for in the Criminal Procedural Code A minor accused of a crime had to have a lawyer and, if he rejected the lawyer, the judge did n have to accept the refusal, as it was assumed that children were not full legal persons. Legal ai was provided free of charge for children with insufficient means.

73. Parents were informed of the facts at the beginning of criminal proceedings and had the right to be present throughout. Children confined in juvenile prisons had the right to unlimited meetings with their parents and could telephone them each day free of charge.

74. Regarding the length of pre-trial detention for minors, the draft amendments to the Criminal Procedural Code were before Parliament. They included provisions establishing the maximum length of pre-trial detention for minors and limiting the judge's right to order the pre-trial detention of a child to the most serious crimes, such as murder or rape.

75. Ms. MIKALAUSKAITĖ (Lithuania), referring to the fact that the year 2000 had been designated the International Year of Youth, said that four main issues had been discussed durin the year: equal opportunities for higher education, the labour market and youth, State-assisted housing for young families and youth criminal offences and drug abuse. Information on the results would be ready at the end of January 2001 and could be provided to the Committee.

76. Mr. PLIKŠNYS (Lithuania) said that it was difficult to integrate Roma children into society. However, over the last two or three years measures had been taken on their behalf and for the period 2000-2004, the Government had approved a programme to integrate the Roma in Lithuanian society.

77. Ms. MIKALAUSKAITĖ (Lithuania) said that the Government had developed a strategic plan to reform the structure, personnel and financing of institutions for children.

78. Mr. PLIKŠNYS (Lithuania), said that both parents and students had complained about the difficulty of the school curriculum and that steps had been taken to reduce the number of hours each week. Children in eleventh and twelfth grade received about 34 hours' schooling a week. The nearly 24 subjects previously taught in school had been reduced to 10 or 11, half of which were compulsory. "Soft profiling", whereby students could choose optional courses for about 5 per cent of the time, had been started in the ninth and tenth grades; it was planned to extend the measure to the fifth to eighth grades. In the ninth to twelfth grades, some hours were dedicated to informal education, which meant that about 25 per cent of the time was devoted to extra-curricular activities.

79. About one third of the places in school were not filled and that cost the Government about $120 million a year. The student-teacher ratio was 11:1. The main problem was quality, which differed greatly depending on the size of the school. The Government was planning a network of schools in each municipality in order to make the best use of resources. As a result, some of the smaller schools would be closed and students would be taken by bus to the larger and better schools.

80. Ms. MIKALAUSKAITĖ (Lithuania) said that a tradition of alcohol abuse had been inherited from previous times; however, society was now changing due to emphasis on the importance and worth of the individual. Lithuanian legislation prohibited advertisements for spirits and cigarettes, and set a minimum age for purchasing alcohol.

81. Drugs had become the main problem. Lithuania had previously been a transit country for drugs from Latin America and Asia to enter Russia, but now drugs were also being manufactured and sold within the country. The previous drug programme for 1996-1997 had attempted to tackle drug abuse by viewing it as organized crime; therefore, all the measures had been aimed at combating crime and not at discouraging young people from using drugs. The programme had been revised and the emphasis was now on keeping drugs out of schools.

82. There were two categories of street children: those who lived on the street permanently and those who spent their days on the street. The social services and mobile street services were trying to integrate the first category into institutions or families and their number was decreasing.

83. Ms. ARMONAVIČIENĖ (Lithuania) said that encouraging mothers to breastfeed their babies up to 3 years of age was a component of the nutrition programme. The Government was trying to increase both the prevalence and duration of breastfeeding by providing pregnant women with information. Random surveys conducted in 1994 and 1999 showed that the programme was obtaining good results, as there had been a significant increase in the number of mothers who were breastfeeding.

84. Ms. MOKHUANE thanked the delegation for a very fruitful and open discussion on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Lithuania. Considering that democracy had been introduced only 10 years before, a great deal had been done to reform the

legislation; now the new laws needed to be fully implemented and actions prioritized. She summarized the points that the Committee would be taking into consideration in its concluding observations, which would be forwarded to Lithuania in due course. It was hoped that, once received, they would be widely disseminated.

85. Mr. KAIRELIS (Lithuania) expressed appreciation for the very constructive dialogue and said that he would inform his Government of the Committee's main findings to enable it to begin taking steps immediately.

86. The CHAIRPERSON suggested that Lithuania might wish to ratify the amendment to article 43, paragraph 2 of the Convention.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.